



# CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **City of Falls Church Adopts Stricter State DWI Laws**

FALLS CHURCH, VA. - On June 28, 2004, the Falls Church City Council unanimously passed an amendment to the City of Falls Church Code authorizing the City to automatically adopt state law changes, once enacted by the General Assembly. As a result, the City has incorporated Virginia State Code Driving While Intoxicated amendments, effective July 1, 2004.

Virginia legislators enacted more than two dozen state laws aimed at reducing alcohol-related driving incidents, making the state one of the nation's strictest on intoxicated drivers. The laws are toughest on repeat offenders and extremely drunk drivers, but also increase the likelihood that first-time drunk drivers will go to jail.

The laws provide that repeat offenders who refuse to take a blood alcohol test will be charged with a misdemeanor, the severity of which depends on the number of previous convictions. First-time offenders will pay a minimum fine of \$250.

The new laws require offenders who have three convictions over the previous five years to serve a six-month minimum jail term without the option of bail. Repeat offenders convicted for a third time within 10 years must serve a 90-day minimum jail term. Three-time offenders also may be required to forfeit their cars.

One of the new laws makes it illegal for drivers to drive with alcohol in their systems if they hold a restricted license due to previous drunken driving convictions. Another law sends drivers with a blood alcohol content of 0.15, nearly twice the legal limit of 0.08, to jail for at least five days, even if they are first-time offenders. The previous threshold for that sentence was a blood alcohol content of 0.20.

According to Virginia State Police statistics, 375 people died from alcohol-related crashes in Virginia in 2002, comprising 41.1 percent of all traffic fatalities in the state, up from 302 in 1997. The City of Falls Church did not experience any fatal crashes due to alcohol in 2002 and 2003.

The state has launched a \$600,000 radio campaign, publicizing the start of an annual initiative to catch more drunk drivers. Under the program, called Checkpoint Strikeforce, law enforcement officers will set up sobriety checkpoints on Virginia roadways once a week from July through January.

For more information, contact the City of Falls Church Police Department at 703-241-5052.

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